October 19, 2016

Dear Eagle County Schools Parents, Guardians and Staff,

We have received the testing results from this past spring’s state assessments, collectively known as the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). Included in these are the results from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career, or PARCC, tests. Looking at the PARCC tests specifically, these assessments attempt to gauge math and literacy skills through complex and computer-based questions and tasks. These assessments are much different and more challenging than the fact/recall bubble-sheet tests many of us took as part of our schooling.

***Background***

The PARCC tests are very different from previous student-achievement tests because they ask students to think critically, construct responses, and apply knowledge they learn throughout their classes. The question design is far more challenging, with multistep problem solving of advanced concepts and assessment for English literacy proficiency including writing.

These tests also dramatically raise the bar in terms of expectations. As Colorado has raised its academic standards to new and unprecedented levels, these tests (which are aligned to those new standards) are also much more difficult than the previous Colorado state tests (known as CSAP or TCAP).

In general, we think raising the bar is a good thing for all students. However, the “pass” rates for these tests are dramatically lower than on previous kinds of tests. Nationally, the best states hover around 50% in terms of “proficiency.”

There has been much written about the controversies with the test design, computer problems experienced during the tests, student opt-outs and refusals, testing bias against English Language Learners and students in poverty, the lateness of the results, and more. In addition, the PARCC tests changed again even from the format used the previous year – calling into question the comparability of the results over time.

Setting all that aside, it is now time to analyze the data, glean nuggets of useful insight, and move forward.

***Results***

Our results in Eagle County Schools match patterns at the state level in terms of 1) relatively low "proficiency" levels, 30%-40% are the norm on this test 2) achievement gaps between economically affluent and disadvantaged students are even larger under this test (because it was dramatically more difficult and was administered all on a computer) and 3) the impact of opt-out levels were significant for some of our schools, with the largest impact at 8th grade.

Here in Eagle County, we had pockets where groups of students and families refused to take the exam. Similar to those across the state, our opt-outs tended to be from more affluent and higher-performing students.

Generally, our middle schools continue to do well individually and collectively, exceeding state levels by a pretty hefty margin in most cases.

Our high school results are also encouraging, particularly in the area of the mathematics exams, where we saw large gains. We know there is a disconnect as to how our high school students performed on the PARCC tests when we consider how they are performing in their regular school work, AP tests, early college credit, and ACT tests – which are trending upward.

Together, these secondary results tell us that the longer students are in our system, the better they do on these tests and in their day-to-day classroom work.

Our elementary schools results varied and in some cases were disappointing. The number of Free/Reduced lunch and English Language Learners (ELL) served at the school heavily predicted the results. Our FRL levels are close to the state average, but we have a much higher percentage of students learning English - which is the language this test is administered in.

In response to the elementary data, these schools are redesigning curricular experiences for students as we speak, changing the instruction for students. While we believe our instructional approaches were quality before, we know we can better align student tasks with what PARCC is asking them to do and give them more opportunities to practice the tests electronically.

To view a copy of both the state and district level PARCC results, please visit the Colorado Department of Education website (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment>), which has additional information about the tests as well as sample tests for parents to try.

***What can we learn from these PARCC results?***

State test scores can provide useful information, but we must remember that it is one piece of information and does not reflect the complete ability or predict the future of any child. Our students come to us with an abundance of talents and strengths. Conversely, PARCC measures student ability in two limited subject areas under artificial conditions while working in isolation. The world is full of incredibly successful people who struggled with standardized tests and went on to live fantastically successful lives – you may be one of these individuals.

The ability of our students to excel in higher education, careers, and life hinges not only on academics - but also on their ability to communicate, create, adapt, take risks, reflect, and grow as human beings.

In spite of the limitations of these assessments and our critiques of them, we strongly believe that Eagle County students are smart and capable of reaching these standards and they have great teachers committed to helping them get there.

***Closing***

We appreciate these results from the perspective that they are one of several data points that will help us grow, identify and resolve shortcomings, and be better at what we do. We are committed to stay our course for teaching all students in Eagle County Schools to high standards. We have important work to do and we continue to be excited and energized every day we see a student realize their full potential.

Thank you for your ongoing trust in the work that we do educating the children of Eagle County.



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Superintendent & Chief Learner